

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. A method for tracking content communicated over a network, comprising:
2 receiving at least one message and associated content from an originator of
3 the content over the network;
4 associating watermark data with the content to provide watermarked
5 content;
6 registering the watermarked content to record an association of the
7 watermarked content with the originator of the watermarked content;
8 monitoring for subsequent transmission of the watermarked content over the
9 network to identify the originator of the watermarked content; and
10 maintaining a content transmission count for each of the originators of the
11 watermarked content that is transmitted over the network.

1 2. The method of Claim 1, further comprising forwarding statistics including
2 at least an identity of the originator of the watermarked content and the corresponding
3 content transmission count to a server, and presenting the forwarded statistics via a site
4 hosted by the server.

1 3. The method of Claim 2, wherein maintaining a content transmission count
2 for each of the originators of the watermarked content comprises maintaining the content
3 transmission count for a plurality of originators of watermarked content, and wherein
4 presenting the forwarded statistics comprises presenting the forwarded statistics in an order
5 based on a relative quantity of transmissions of the plurality of originators of the
6 watermarked content.

1 4. The method of Claim 1, further comprising generating a bonus for the
2 originator of the watermarked content based at least in part on the content transmission
3 count.

1 5. The method of Claim 4, wherein generating a bonus comprises any one or
2 more of providing the originator of the registered content with a reduced network access
3 charge, free network access, a prize, a monetary reward, or publicity.

1 6. The method of Claim 1, wherein associating watermark data with the
2 content comprises embedding electronically perceptible data into the content.

1 7. The method of Claim 1, wherein associating watermark data with the
2 content comprises:
3 encrypting at least some attributes of the content to provide encrypted data;
4 hashing at least some of the attributes of the content to provide a machine
5 authentication code (MAC); and
6 executing a watermark algorithm using the content, the encrypted data, and
7 the MAC as inputs to the watermark algorithm.

1 8. The method of Claim 7, wherein executing the watermark algorithm
2 comprises deriving a bit pattern from the content, encrypted data, and MAC, and inserting
3 the bit pattern into the content.

1 9. The method of Claim 1, further comprising including detection data with
2 the watermarked content, and wherein monitoring for subsequent transmission of the
3 watermarked content comprises detecting the detection data, and verifying the watermark
4 data for the watermarked content that includes the detection data.

1 10. The method of Claim 9, wherein detecting the detection data comprises
2 detecting the detection data at a message routing entity, and further comprising forwarding
3 watermarked content that includes the detection data to a message tracking system.

1 11. The method of Claim 10, wherein the at least one message comprises a
2 Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) message, and wherein detecting the detection data

3 at a message routing entity comprises detecting the detection data at an Multimedia
4 Messaging Service Center (MMSC).

1 12. The method of Claim 9, wherein verifying the watermark data comprises
2 verifying the watermark data at the message tracking system.

1 13. The method of Claim 1, wherein monitoring for subsequent transmission of
2 the watermarked content comprises detecting the watermarked content transmitted over the
3 network, and verifying the watermark data.

1 14. The method of Claim 13, wherein verifying the watermark data comprises:
2 extracting the watermark data from the watermarked content;
3 comparing at least some of the extracted watermark data to a plurality of
4 associations of watermarked content and corresponding content originators; and
5 designating the watermark data as verified if the extracted watermark data
6 corresponds to any of the plurality of associations of watermarked content and
7 corresponding content originators.

1 15. The method of Claim 14, further comprising decrypting the extracted
2 watermark data, and wherein comparing at least some of the extracted watermark data to a
3 plurality of associations of watermarked content and corresponding content originators
4 comprises comparing at least some of the decrypted watermark data to the plurality of
5 associations of watermarked content and corresponding content originators.

1 16. The method of Claim 1, wherein registering the content comprises storing at
2 least the association of the watermarked content with the originator of the watermarked
3 content in a registration database.

1 17. The method of Claim 1, wherein receiving at least one message and
2 associated content comprises receiving, as an intermediary, a message originating from a
3 first user targeted for at least one other user.

1 18. The method of Claim 1, wherein receiving at least one message and
2 associated content comprises receiving, as an addressee, the message and associated
3 content from the originator of the content, and further comprising returning registered,
4 watermarked content to the originator of the content.

1 19. The method of Claim 1, wherein:
2 receiving at least one message and associated content comprises receiving
3 the message and associated content from the originator of the content at a web server via a
4 web browsing session;
5 associating watermark data with the content comprises associating the
6 watermark data with the content at the web server;
7 registering the watermarked content comprises receiving and registering the
8 watermarked content at a message tracking system; and
9 monitoring for subsequent transmission of the watermarked content
10 comprises monitoring for subsequent transmission of the watermarked content at the
11 message tracking system.

1 20. The method of Claim 1, further comprising creating the content via user
2 equipment of the originator of the content.

1 21. The method of Claim 1, further comprising uploading the content to user
2 equipment of the originator of the content.

1 22. The method of Claim 1, wherein the message and associated content are
2 received by any of a Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) message, Enhanced
3 Messaging Service (EMS) message, Short Message Service (SMS), Smart Message, or
4 electronic mail (e-mail) message.

1 23. A method for tracking content communicated via Multimedia Messaging
2 Service (MMS) messages over a network, comprising:

3 receiving MMS messages communicated over the network at a Multimedia
4 Messaging Service Center (MMSC);
5 forwarding the MMS messages to a message tracking system;
6 associating a watermark with content provided via the MMS messages to
7 generate watermarked content at the message tracking system;
8 registering the watermarked content at the message tracking system to
9 record an association of the watermarked content with an originator of the watermarked
10 content;
11 monitoring for subsequent MMS transmission of the watermarked content
12 over the network to identify the originator of the watermarked content; and
13 maintaining a content transmission count for each of the originators of the
14 watermarked content that is transmitted over the network.

1 24. A message tracking system coupled to receive messages and associated
2 content from a message routing entity over a network, the message tracking system
3 comprising:
4 a processing system;
5 a watermarking module operable via the processing system and configured
6 to associate watermark data with the content to generate watermarked content;
7 a registration module operable via the processing system and configured to
8 register the watermarked content as being received at the message tracking system;
9 a watermark verification module operable via the processing system and
10 configured to recognize watermarked content that has been previously registered; and
11 wherein the registration module tracks a number of times in which the
12 previously registered watermarked content has been received at the message tracking
13 system for each originator of the watermark data.

1 25. A system for tracking content communicated via messaging between
2 devices operable on a network, comprising:

3 a message center coupled to the network to receive messages and associated
4 content from message source devices targeted for one or more message destination
5 devices;

6 a message tracking system coupled to receive the messages and associated
7 content from the message center, the message tracking system comprising:

8 a processing system;

9 a watermarking module operable via the processing system and
10 configured to associate watermark data with the content to generate watermarked
11 content;

12 a registration module operable via the processing system and
13 configured to register the watermarked content as being received at the message
14 tracking system;

15 a watermark verification module operable via the processing system
16 and configured to recognize watermarked content that has been previously
17 registered; and

18 wherein the registration module tracks a number of times in which
19 the previously registered watermarked content has been received at the message
20 tracking system for each originator of the watermark data.

1 26. The system of Claim 25, wherein the messages and associated content
2 comprise Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) messages, and wherein the message
3 center comprises at least one Multimedia Messaging Service Center (MMSC).

1 27. The system of Claim 26, wherein the watermarking module is further
2 configured to associate detection data with the content.

1 28. The system of Claim 27, wherein the at least one MMSC comprises a
2 detection module to identify content having the detection data, and to forward messages
3 having the detection data from the message source devices to the message tracking system.

1 29. The system of Claim 25, wherein the message tracking system is configured
2 to forward the messages and associated content to the message center upon completion of
3 processing by the message tracking system, and wherein the message center is configured
4 to deliver the messages and associated content to the one or more message destination
5 devices.

1 30. The system of Claim 25, wherein the message tracking system further
2 comprises a bonus generation module operable via the processing system and configured
3 to generate a bonus for originators of the content based on the number of times in which
4 the previously registered watermarked content has been received at the message tracking
5 system.

1 31. The system of Claim 25, wherein the system further comprises a server
2 coupled to the message tracking system and configured to host a site to present statistics
3 for at least some of the originators of the content, wherein the statistics include at least the
4 number of times in which the previously registered watermarked content has been received
5 at the message tracking system.

1 32. The system of Claim 31, wherein the server comprises one of a World Wide
2 Web (WWW) server or a Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) server.

1 33. A computer-readable medium having instructions stored thereon which are
2 executable by a computer system for tracking content communicated over a network by
3 performing steps comprising:
4 receiving at least one message and associated content from an originator of
5 the content over the network;
6 associating watermark data with the content to provide watermarked
7 content;
8 registering the watermarked content to record an association of the
9 watermarked content with the originator of the watermarked content;

10 monitoring for subsequent transmission of the watermarked content over the
11 network to identify the originator of the watermarked content; and
12 maintaining a content transmission count for each of the originators of the
13 watermarked content that is transmitted over the network.

1 34. A message tracking system coupled to receive Multimedia Messaging
2 Service (MMS) messages and associated content from a Multimedia Messaging Service
3 Center (MMSC) over a network, the message tracking system comprising:
4 means for associating a watermark with the content to provide watermarked
5 content;
6 means for registering the watermarked content to record an association of
7 the watermarked content with an originator of the watermarked content;
8 means for identifying subsequent transmission of the watermarked content
9 over the network and for identifying the originator of the watermarked content; and
10 means for maintaining a content transmission count for each of the
11 originators of the watermarked content that is transmitted over the network.